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RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 1277
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 000722

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DS/IP/NEA, DS/ICI/CI

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: ATTACK ON CUSTOMS OFFICIALS SPARKS MAJOR OFFENSIVE
AGAINST TERRORISTS

Classified By: Melissa Foynes, RSO Algiers: Reason (d)

¶1. (U) According to an April 10 article in the official French daily El Moudjahid, corroborated by an announcement from the Ministry of the Interior, an orchestrated terrorist attack on Algerian Customs officials by the Group Salafist for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) on April 7 sparked a major offensive by Algerian security forces (ANP) to kill or capture the perpetrators. The offensive resulted in a two-day siege near Aflou, destroyed vehicles, captured weapons, and inflicted many casualties. As of this report, ANP forces continue operations to eliminate all remnants of the group.

¶2. (U) The initial attack against a convoy of customs officials traveling from Bechar to Ouargla killed thirteen officials and wounded eight. The officials were on their way to a regional meeting when they were attacked outside the city of El Golea. Press reports indicate the convoy was a target of opportunity for a heavily armed terrorist group of 20 or more members.

¶3. (SBU) The ANP, augmented by municipality guards, self-defense forces and helicopter gunships, responded to the attack and besieged the wilayas of El Aghouat and Ghardaia, quickly identifying eight Toyota 4x4 vehicles as targets. The destruction of the vehicles, laden with explosives, 50 KM northeast of Hassi Chebaba resulted in two large explosions. The ANP told us fifteen terrorists were killed and a large cache of weapons was recovered. Other well-informed security contacts have confirmed the accuracy of the press accounts concerning the counter-attack and capture of arms. According to ANP sources, the offensive will continue until the entire group is eliminated.

¶4. (U) The following is a list by quantity of explosives and weapons recovered:

- (1) - 14.5mm heavy machine gun
- (6) - RPG-7 rocket launchers
- (1) - 60mm mortar
- (4) - light machine guns
- (59) - AK-47 assault rifles
- (1) - rifle with telescope
- (1) - heavy machine gun
- (15) - pistols
- (311)- chargers for different arms
- (53) - mortar rounds
- (1) - 12.7 HMG
- (16) - cases of ammunition of varying caliber

15. (C) Comments: Embassy contacts confirm the accuracy of the El Moudjahid article. This attack reinforces RSO concerns regarding travel in remote areas outside the wilaya of Algiers. Although the situation in the capital remains calm, in outlying areas pockets of terrorists remain and the security forces exercise less control. The timing of this attack, in the final stages of President Bouteflika's national reconciliation strategy, demonstrates the defiance and boldness of the remaining terrorists who have refused to lay down their arms and reintegrate into society. The sophistication of the attack and the size of the cache of weapons and explosives recovered revealed a well-equipped and capable terrorist group. While Algeria has made much progress in defeating terrorism as a strategic threat, this attack is a reminder that the terrorist threat remains. The success to date in eliminating the attackers, destroying their vehicles and capturing their arm stores also attests to the determination of Algerian security forces to neutralize the remaining terrorist cells.

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